

The Dignity and Vocation of Women
Holy Trinity Apostolate
September 14, 2002
St. John's Conference Center
Sterling Heights, Michigan

JTH Pastoral Center
Dec 9, 2002
Feast of Immaculate
Conception

"Blessed Be Jesus Christ, True God and True Man"

"Blessed Be The Great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy"

I. Introduction: 10 minutes

A. What does it mean to say the body is beautiful on this Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross? We will ponder together a series of questions?

1. Whose body?

- a. Of our crucified Lord.
- b. Think of the horror of today- kidnaping, murders, rapes of young girls and boys
- c. How does our body become the gift from God and our parents that enables us to become acting persons (AP 204-5) for one another?
"The body is the territory and in a way the means for the performance of action and consequently for the fulfillment of the person." p. 205
- d. The key concept is 'person,' whole and entire in relation with others --- not compartmentalized parts of persons put in boxes [CCC #362ff.]

2. What kind of beauty?

- a. Review the paradox noted by Isaiah and Plato- outwardly no beauty behold
 - i. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 ... "he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.... But he was wounded for our transgressions... [and] bruised for our iniquities..."
 - ii. Socrates was like an ugly satyr on the outside, but full of beauty and virtue on the inside - ref in Plato's *Symposium* 211c-222d because he led others from love of superficial physical beauty to love of the most beautiful thing in the world = the good
- b. beauty is a quality of the whole person directed from within -incarnate spirit
 - i. What is the purpose of this creature created by God?
 - ii. What is the body's purpose in this creature?
 - iii. "The body, in its masculinity and femininity, is called 'from the beginning' to become the manifestation of the spirit." *Unity* 141-145
- c. Maritain, following Thomas Aquinas, identifies three characteristics of beauty: 1) integrity or wholeness, 2) proper proportion, and 3) radiance

- d. We will see how the most beautiful thing is the virtuous person who is giving to others through total self donation *Unity* pp. 106-152
 - i. the self gift of a whole person = integrity
 - ii. thus, the person is always in relation to someone outside = proper proportion
 - iii. The blessing of fecundity or fertility *Unity* pp. 153-178 = radiance

3. What is woman's part in building the beauty of the Mystical Body of Christ -- The Church?

- a. what is woman's part in relation to the degeneration of human dignity in the world? [MD#18 and EV #99]
- b. what is woman's beauty in relation to the increasing ugliness in human relations in the world?
- c. what is woman's goodness in relation to the fragmentation and bad actions that occur in this world?

B. Our answers to these questions will draw upon:

- 1. **Philosophical foundation** for women's identity seen as a whole and harmonious nature given to service (Karol Wojtyla's philosophical writings)
 - a. Articulated in *Love and Responsibility* (1960)
 - b. *The Acting Person* (1969)
 - c. *Person and Community* (essays from 1957-1989)
- 2. As elaborated further during the 23 years of Holy Father Pope John Paul II Pontificate in Five phases:
 - a. Wednesday night audiences on the *Original Unity of Man and Woman* (1979-1980)
 - b. Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988)
 - c. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994)
 - d. *Evangelium Vitae* #99 and comments of women's genius in relation to the UN Conference on Women (1995)
 - e. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001) At the Beginning of the Third Millennium
- 3. Will focus on **common nature of all women** which may be expressed differently in different vocations
- 4. **Outline and Bibliography** at the end for those who want to study this topic further

II. Session I: 25 minutes

A. Woman's identity at the beginning *Audiences on Genesis*

- 1. **Equal dignity** in creation of man and woman as human persons CCC #369 "Man and woman have been created...on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman." and MD#6 and **significant difference** of two ways of being a human person and

Unity, pp. 15-60

2.. **Called into fruitful communion** CCC# 1702 and Unity pp. 60-105

B. The rupture in relations after the Fall

1. Dulled intellect, weakened will, and disordered passions CCC#400

2. **Disordered relations** with God, nature, and man Unity pp. 27-33

a. women desire to possess men MD#9-10

b. men desire to dominate women

C. The path to redemption through Christ's calling for a new *ethos* in women

1. "The new dimension of *ethos* is always connected with the revelation of that depth, which is called 'heart' ...in order that the man, man and female, in all the interior truth of the mutual 'for' may shine more fully in the heart." (Audience of 9/8/80)

a. what is *ethos*?

b. analogy with definition of a good knife in the kitchen (Aristotle and St. Thomas)

i. the function or purpose of a knife is to cut

ii. a good knife is one which cuts well

iii. therefore the virtue or the *ethos* of a knife is to cut well

c. thus, to find the *ethos* of woman, we need to identify her function

d. then, a woman has to choose to live out ^{her} function act by act over her lifetime "Lived morality is always the *ethos* of human practice."
[audience of 10/15/80] (MD 12)

2. **The personalistic norm** describes the *ethos* of human life for both men and women

a. personalistic norm, **positive form** = always act towards another person as an end worthy of love) LR 41 and 66-67

b. **negative form** = never treat a person as a means to an end, but only as an end in himself or herself

c. **love is an ontological and ethical requirement** of the person MD #29

i. we find our self by giving our self to another (= the law of the gift inscribed deep in the structure of the human person) PC, 194

ii. and by saying 'yes' to the lives of the human beings entrusted to us MD #30

3.. "The *ethos* of women is to accept new life MD#14-15

a. **motherhood in the personal sense is active** MD#18-19

i. Mary shows the way

ii. we follow as mothers (biological and spiritual) in the world

iii. the spiritual life is higher than the biological life

iv. how do I express my I with the richness of my flesh?

v. how do I express my I in this relationship?

iv. it is oriented towards the person's fulfillment

b. the "father of lies" lies in wait to devour the child MD #30

- i. sadly people do not realize their true identity
- ii. lack of self governance
- iii. indifference or laziness about communicating the true self in relationship
- iv. **self knowledge is so crucial. *Fides et ratio* #1 ("Know yourself")**
- v. for example, the secular model penetrates our life so completely we are unaware of it

a. e.g. giving material rewards for spiritual values (candy for doing a good deed (like sweeping the room)) attempt to control by pleasure

b. the slippery slope- lowers from the higher to the lower value: spiritual values are activities which give joy in themselves, material values, while good, are divided when shared.

c. substitutes training for educating or releasing the inner activity towards its final goal

d. far reaching effects in homes in schools 1) human person reduced to a thing or part of a thing (cell, tissue, organ)

2) Abortion - reduce to thing - fetus, cell, embryo, tissue - interrupt pregnancy

namely, conscious conscience does not let her forget that she has taken the life of her own child for she cannot destroy the readiness to accept life

c. the Christian life is in conflict with secular humanism

- i. how do I penetrate through myself to bring to myself in truth to another?
- ii. how can I come into full self-governance through using this flesh which has been given to me by Christ and for Christ?

Break:

which marries her ethos from the beginning. MD 12

II. Second Session: 30 minutes

A. The 'Genius' of Women What is it? How does Pope John Paul II describe it?

1. **Past** First mentioned in "thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine 'genius' which have appeared in the course of **history**.." MD#31

2. **Present** Angelus reflection July 23, 1995: "In fact women has a genius all her own, which is vitally essential to both society and the church...In *Mulieris Dignitatem* I highlighted one aspect of feminine genius, that I would like to stress today: Woman is endowed with a particular capacity for accepting the human being in his concrete form." GW, p. 28

3. **Future** *Letter to Women* 1995: where he states his hope that women "will reflect carefully on what it means to speak of the "genius of women," not only in order to be able to see in this phrase a specific part of God's plan which needs to be accepted and appreciated, but also in order to let this genius be more fully expressed in the life of society as a whole as well as in the life of the church." (#10 p. 540

B. Where does women's genius come from?

1 Biological and experiential root:. A woman's body gives a possible consciousness through ~~X~~ ovulation from puberty to menopause of preparing to accept new life LR 280

- a. Shared by all women GW #1, p. 25 and MD #18
- b. Lived experience of motherhood may increase this consciousness

2. Spiritual and ontological root:. Woman's identity is also ontologically personal, and includes an experience of 'I act' as well as of 'something happens in me'

- a. Shared by all women created uniquely by God to be this particular woman
- b. Even though some women ~~chose~~ ^{chase} to act against their identity
- c. MD #18 "Motherhood is linked to the personal structure of the women and to the personal dimension of the gift (of self).
 - i. MD #30 "A woman is strong because of her awareness of this entrusting, strong because of the fact that God 'entrusts the human being to her,' always and in every way, even in the situations of social discrimination in which she may find herself. This awareness and this fundamental vocation speak to women of the dignity which they receive from God himself, and this makes them 'strong' and strengthens their vocation."
- d. women's genius is related to a new call of John Paul II directed to women
 - i. It has something to do with how women can lead men into this renewal of Christian life in the midst of a secular culture
 - ii. review *Mulieris dignitatem* #18 "... it is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person... ; in many ways he has to learn his own fatherhood from the mother... the mother's contribution is decisive in laying the foundation for a new human personality

C. The Holy Father's Call for a 'New Feminism'

1. What is it? The call of John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae* #99 surprised many: "It depends on them [women] to promote a 'new feminism' which rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination' in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation."

- a. **discrimination thwarts** the development of the person
 - b. **violence contravenes** a person's exercise of free will
 - c. **exploitation treats** a person as a means and not as an end in herself
- 2. How does a new feminism help the world?**
- a. by fostering the dignity of **every** human life
 - i. not just some human lives
 - ii. Jesus took on human nature and gave it a dignity beyond compare: *Gaudium et spes* #19 and 22 He reveals us to ourselves
 - iii. "Society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person's life." EV #81
 - b. by fostering human life towards its **full development**
 - i. EV#30 "the Gospel of life includes everything that human experience and reason tell us about the value of human life, accepting it, exalting it and bringing it to fulfilment."
 - ii. EV 35 "whether man or woman ...God... [is] the definitive goal and fulfilment of every person."
 - c. by fostering human life towards **the common good**
 - i. the common good demands the good or this working towards the fulfilment of **all** persons CCC#1906
 - ii. this separates out new feminism from many other forms which work only towards the good of one segment of society
- 3. How can women in particular respond to this call to express their genius in building a new culture through a new feminism?**
- A. Expressing the genius of women in every circumstance:** MD #30
 "Our time in particular awaits the manifestation of that 'genius' which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human and because the greatest of these is love."
 - B. Expressing this genius of women in the home**
 - 1. In the third millennium the call to the laity to develop virtues "**starting afresh in Christ**"
 - a. How live Christian virtues listed in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* from a women's perspective? [#29-43]
 - b. **Living a unity of life in:**
 - i **holiness** [universal call, "it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity." #31]
 - ii **prayer** [education in the art of prayer #33-34]
 - iii **Sunday Eucharist** [the sacrament of unity #36]

iv. Sacrament of Reconciliation. [ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness #37]

v. witness to the primacy of grace in the results of our work #38

vi. listening to the word #39 [see MC#19 “The motherhood of every woman ...is similarly not only of flesh and blood; it expresses a profound listening to the word of the living God and a readiness to safeguard this Word, which is the word of eternal life,”]

vii, proclaiming the word #40 [“which can not be left to a group of specialists but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God...they must proclaim him.”]

viii. in witnessing to love [“love is the heart of the church” and “stake everything on charity”] [Note MD# 28 “In God’s eternal plan, woman is the ~~one~~ ^{core} in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root.”]

2. Women’s special place in the home = 1st cell of the church

a. press for a new sense of Catholic formation in the home through the practice of the above 8 virtues for the new millennium

b. the true way to living in the third millennium is through virtuous women inviting the fathers and husbands to follow their lead

3. Leading men through her genius

a. recall *Mulieris dignitatem* #18 “... it is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person... ; in many ways he has to learn his own fatherhood from the mother... the mother’s contribution is decisive in laying the foundation for a new human personality

b..a woman’s genius will be expressed partly in the way she teaches men to do this

c. using the old stereotype: ask how can a woman attract or seduce the men in her area of influence toward living Christian virtues?

C. Women expressing this genius in complement with men throughout the church and the world [“let this genius be more fully expressed in the life of society as a whole, as well as in the life of the Church... This is another aspect —different from the conjugal aspect, but also important —

of that "help" which women, according to the Book of Genesis, are called to give to men." GW p. 54]

1. In the school, university, and in health care — 2. In his *Letter to Women* #4 he says that the greater presence of women in society will lead to a humanization of institutions organized "according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity." [GW p. 49]

2. In business --In an angelus reflection of August 20, 1995 he notes that the greater presence of ^{women in} business when in executive positions in the economy, is "giving it a new human inspiration and removing it from the recurring temptation of dull efficiency marked only by laws of profit." [GW p. 32]

4. In politics -- he notes the activity of women in working towards peace. [GW33-34]

Conclusion: 5 minutes

1. Return to the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

2. Consider how Mary stood at the foot of the cross two thousand years ago

A. Mary is the vibrant source of the new feminism of John Paul II

B. In *Redemptoris Mater* #39 we discover the fulness of her personal identity...as:

"Mary became not only the nursing mother of the son of man but also the associate of **unique nobility** of the Messiah and Redeemer....as she advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and in this pilgrimage to the foot of the Cross there was simultaneously accomplished her maternal cooperation with the Savior's whole mission through her **actions and sufferings**. Along the path of this collaboration with the work of her Son, the Redeemer, Mary's motherhood underwent a singular transformation, becoming ever more imbued with **burning charity** towards all those to whom Christ's mission was directed."

3. Women stand at the foot of the cross today, every suffering woman, every day

a. in this suffering, women weep at what it could have been and is no more

i. women experience a brokenness in their own body and sometimes seek to evade this truth by becoming someone else, a skeleton of who she truly is

ii. women reach out to embrace the hand of a child she lost and buried and her tears never stop coming at hearing a favorite song

iii not one woman in a home has not suffered a million deaths as a parent and spouse.

iv. sometimes in this suffering her mind sinks, turned away from her true *ethos*

4. If we women can discover the true exaltation of the Holy Cross !.

- a. by facing the duplicity or inertia in our own lives
- b. facing the truth of who each one of us really is
- c. by coming to love the body the Lord has given us to work out our redemption with
- d. by giving ourselves in collaborative work with Mary and Jesus Christ, with other women and men
- e. Let us all purify our hearts, minds, wills, and start afresh from Christ — there is no other way.
- f. then we will truly discover the deeper meaning of the expression “The Body is Beautiful” and experience a joy beyond all our expectations.

Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM, PhD
Chair: Department of Philosophy
St. John Vianney Theological Seminary
Denver, Colorado

Selected Bibliography related to Woman's and Man's Identity in Catholic Thought

Pope John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the book of Genesis* (1979-1980)(Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1981).

-----, *Redemptoris Mater* (Mother of the Redeemer) (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1987).

-----, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1988). [MD]

-----, *Redemptoris Custos* (St. Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer, 1989) [RC].

-----, *Evangelium Vitae* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1995) [EV]

-----, *The Genius of Women* (Washington D.C.: NCCB/USCC, 1997). [GW]

-----, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001) At the Beginning of the Third Millennium [NMI]

Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility* (1960)(San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981). [LR]

-----, *The Acting Person* (1969) (Boston: D. Reidel, 1979). [AP]

-----, *Person and Community* (essays from 1957-1989) (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). [PC]

Other:

Catechism of the Catholic Church (New York: Doubleday, 1994) [CCC]

Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM, “Integral Sex Complementarity and the Theology of Communion,” *Communio* 17 (Winter, 1990):523-544.

-----, “Freedom and the Fatherhood of Priests,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (January 2002): 18-27.

-----, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750BC-1250AD* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1997).

-----, *The Concept of Woman: The Early Humanist Reformation 1250-1500* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 2002) ,

